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Murdered Chicago mobster was 'recruited by CIA'

From HELLA PICK, Washington, June 20

The unsavoury exposure of CIA involvement in political assassinations received a new twist today with the murder of Sam Giancano, a Chicago mobster whom the CIA is alleged to have recruited for attempts to poison Fidel Castro, his younger brother, and Ché Guevara, in 1961.

Giancano, who was 65, is generally assumed to have been the leader of the Chicago crime syndicate. He had returned to Chicago recently after a self-imposed

exile in Mexico where he had a home and other business interests.

He was shot six times in the head, and investigators are convinced that it was a "professional job." The normal assumption would be that his shooting was a gangland execution. Giancano himself is known to have ordered scores of killings during 17 years of prominence in the Chicago Mafia. However, Giancano has also during the last few days been at the centre of reports about the CIA plot against Castro.

Giancano has extensive gambling interests in Cuba, and he lost a lot of money there when they were closed down when Castro came to power. According to recent reports which have been partially confirmed by sources with access to the Rockefeller investigation into the CIA as well as to the Senate hearings, Giancano, together with another underworld figure, John Roselli, were recruited in 1960 to organise the assassination of the three Cuban leaders. The assassinations were intended to coincide with the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961, with the object of maximising political confusion on the island.

One of Howard Hughes's aides, Robert Maheu, a former CIA agent, was reportedly recruited to act as middleman between the CIA and the actual plotters. It was Mr Maheu who is alleged to have chosen Mr Roselli and Mr Giancano to organise the assassination attempts. The three moved to Miami Beach to supervise the plot. Three separate attempts are said to have been conceived, but evidently none proved successful.

Mr Maheu pleaded the fifth amendment last week when asked to testify before the Church Senate Commission on

intelligence activities. Mr Roselli, who has been asked to testify next week, will also plead the fifth amendment. But both men are to be given immunity from criminal prosecution, and will then testify.

In addition to all the talk of CIA assassination, a new and possibly even more unsavoury element has entered the debate over the role played by the CIA. It has long been known that the intelligence agency tolerated, and indeed actively encouraged, the opium trade in Thailand, Laos, and South Vietnam, as part of a policy of rallying local support for the US. Now, it seems that the CIA turn a blind eye when its agents smuggle opium in to the US for conversion into heroin. One of the CIA agents, a Thai, was caught in 1974 trying to smuggle 100 lb of raw opium into the US. The CIA stepped in and persuaded the Department of Justice to drop charges on the grounds that the situation proved embarrassing. The man in question was allowed to return to Thailand. Without CIA protection he would have faced several years in prison.

It is, however, the CIA's involvement in assassinations that has become the centre of an increasingly acid political controversy with charges going backwards and forwards over the involvement of the Kennedy brothers as well as of President Eisenhower. Vice-President Rockefeller has implied that the Kennedys were involved at least by knowledge of the CIA's assassination plots. Senator Edward Kennedy has hotly defended his two brothers' reputations and is exceedingly angry. Some political observers believe that the allegations against the good name of Kennedy may prove a new rallying point for Kennedy supporters.